

Without a doubt, adding a hands-on component to your recertification or on-farm training program will require more pre-planning than a traditional classroom lecture. But the extra effort is well worth the time. Participants of hands-on training programs often rate them as the best classes ever attended.

Take the "hands-on" plunge at your next training program. When students walk away from this class, they'll be leaving with skills they can put to the test.

Taking the classroom to the student

Hands-on pesticide training builds partnerships, safer workforce

Two years ago, the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) introduced a hands-on training program for pesticide handlers. In that time, 250 people have attended the interactive workshops related to the proper handling of pesticides.

"The mobile classroom concept is an effective program, one worthy of being expanded statewide," said Phil Hull, Washington Growers League, whose organization sponsored three hands-on programs for a total of 120 trainees earlier in the year. "Hands-on training gives people invaluable skills and confidence; clearly, the employer benefits from a well-trained workforce and a safe work environment."

To meet the growing demand for hands-on training, the program's key organizers, WSDA and Washington State University Cooperative Extension, plan to offer more workshops where handlers live and work. In the training, pesticide workers learn through doing. Among other activities, handlers practice how to:

- control and clean up pesticide spills
- select proper safety equipment and clothing
- mix and load pesticide
- dispose of product

In addition to pesticide safety basics, future curriculum offerings include drift management and equipment calibration. The hands-on partnership also invites employers to attend training events and observe instruction firsthand.

WHY ISN'T THERE MORE HANDS-ON TRAINING?

In Washington, pesticide-handler training is required by law (see Worker Protection Standard, Chapter 16-233 WAC, at www.wa.gov/agr/pmd/docs/rcw/16-233.doc). Growers who hire Spanish-speaking workers sometimes find it difficult to meet the training requirement. Growers may lack Spanish-speaking skills or the resources to provide training in their employees' native language.

WSDA and WSU Cooperative Extension hope to make on-site training programs a widespread reality. Broadening the program, however, will mean enlisting the help of additional co-sponsors and bilingual volunteers.

"We're looking for people who can make a commitment to attend a daylong train-the-trainer course and teach one or more hands-on training programs in their own or neighboring counties," said Margaret Tucker, branch manager of WSDA's Certification & Training program.

A how-to guide for growers who wish to sponsor a training event is available through the Pesticide Management Division. In addition, WSDA and WSU Grant-Adams Cooperative Extension will provide technical assistance to any grower interested in conducting on-site training.

For information, contact Flor Tovar, (509) 662-0590, ftovar@agr.wa.gov or Ofelio Borges, (509) 225-2625, oborges@agr.wa.gov or Karen Lewis, (509) 760-2263, kmlewis@wsu.edu.



Fig. 4. When group size is small, all participants get involved and learn more.



Fig. 5. When group size is big, participants find it more difficult to get involved.

Editor's Note:

The hands-on training sessions are organized by WSDA and WSU Cooperative Extension with instruction provided by trainers in the tree fruit industry. Previous training programs have been co-sponsored by the Wenatchee Valley College, WSDA Farmworker Education Committee and the Columbia Basin Tree Fruit Society.